Interview with Margaret Joy Tibbetts

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AMBASSADOR MARGARET JOY TIBBETTS

Interviewed by: Ann Miller Morin

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Q: Could you tell me who recommended you to be an ambassador?

TIBBETTS: I think there was a group of people. I was in the right place at the right time, to use the clich#. And when I went in to see Mr. Rusk—I was traveling with the Senior Seminar in California when they made the announcement. The president had his own reasons, vis-#-vis the women's groups, for making it. And Mr. Rusk, whom I had not met before, said, “Well, Miss Tibbetts, you seem to had been the choice of the establishment.” I was—you're always slightly cynical about these things. I was pleased. I had a fairly good knowledge of my own position in my class, and I knew that if all went well and I stayed out of trouble, someday I'd be an ambassador. But I've always said and believed that the Women's Movement pressure and President Johnson's initiative of naming all these people at that point moved it up by six or seven years.

Why was I the choice of the establishment? I think that I had more experience in political work than most people. I had more political experience than most women. That's always an accident, but it had happened. And I have also, in one of my earlier posts not too long ago at that point, about eight or nine years previously—when I was in the Congo, I had

been in charge quite a lot by one of those quirks of fate; the man who was the consul general had a tendency to be restless, and he traveled, perhaps, more than he knew. Anyway, when the inspectors came, they discovered that I'd been in charge approximately three of four of the preceding eight months. And that's the sort of thing with inspectors; they must write something, you know; they made a big deal of it. So there was, perhaps, the feeling, “Well, she can, if necessary, operate a post,” because I'd gotten along.

Also, I think the last ambassador for whom I'd served, Douglas MacArthur II, than whom there is no one tougher, had given a grudging seal of approval. But particularly the political experience. So I think that's why I was the choice. There weren't too many of us who'd had political experience.

Q: No, and especially not at that time.

TIBBETTS: That's right.

Q: How did you learn of your nomination?

TIBBETTS: I was in San Francisco with the group, with the senior seminar, and I think someone heard it over the radio. It's one of these things. Well, there was no way of tracking me down; we were all out visiting some agricultural establishment, or something like that.

Q: Could you tell me how you prepared yourself for the Senate hearings? Who was on the committee, the atmosphere of it?

TIBBETTS: Well, the atmosphere was extremely friendly. The only people whom I remember were Senator Fulbright and Senator Aiken. I prepared myself carefully for the Senate hearings. By that time, I'd had two or three months. And I'd been taking Norwegian, and I had worked a great deal on NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] matters. In fact, I'd been to Norway on NATO questions some four or five years earlier.

And I'd also—I'd been in the heart of European affairs for years. So I went through the usual things one does, and the atmosphere couldn't have been more friendly. Senator Aiken, of course, was pleased that someone from northern New England—and Senator Fulbright was pleased that I had a good academic background.

Q: Yes, yes. He didn't ask you any "zingers"?

TIBBETTS: No, no. They asked me only the mildest of questions.

Q: Did they?

TIBBETTS: They asked me why I'd studied Norwegian. And I said, "Because the people in Norway spoke Norwegian." [Laughter] They seemed to think that was very satisfactory.

Q: It was a good reason. I know you were received by the president. Were you received by the secretary of state?

TIBBETTS: Yes, I was received by the secretary of state. I was when I first came back, and I think I spoke with him before I went. Again, to harp back, I was an EUR hand. I came and went on the seventh floor fairly often in the line of business.

Q: So you knew all those people. Could you briefly describe your swearing-in ceremony?

TIBBETTS: Yes. It was in what is now—I guess it was then—the Adams Room, with all the Adams memorabilia, and very impressive, with portraits and things, too. There was a very large crowd. Mr. Rusk himself swore me in. And they made quite a deal of it, which pleased me, of course, because the only people who matter, whose opinion you care at all about, are your peers.

Q: Are your peers, precisely.

TIBBETTS: You couldn't care less about anybody else.

Q: When you left for your post, did anybody from your host government—any Norwegians—come to see you off? Or did you leave privately?

TIBBETTS: I left from New York. I had been up to, on the way—the Department of Commerce, I guess, wanted me to stop and look at the Norwegian exhibit. There was some kind of a world's exposition going on in 1964; I don't remember what—New York World's Fair of some kind. And the Norway-American Chamber of Commerce—so I went to a dinner party there. And I knew all the Norwegians. The Norwegian ambassador had given me a dinner; and they gave me the great treatment again. EUR is EUR, you know.

Q: Sure, exactly. You had been at the heart of everything.

TIBBETTS: I'd been right there.

Q: Yes. Did you stop over anywhere en route?

TIBBETTS: No. I went by ship, simply because it was a Norwegian-American line and I wanted to see what it was like, because the Oslofjord, it took about ten days and it was very pleasant;—yes, I stopped in Copenhagen and talked with Katherine White; that's right. She was there, and she'd been there about three weeks. She was a woman from New Jersey who'd been in the Democratic Women's end, and an excellent ambassador, excellent, smart woman. We had a lot to do with each other.

Q: Yes, yes. I can see that. How many months did you have at FSI [Foreign Service Institute] with Norwegian? I know you didn't like the way—

TIBBETTS: I took about four weeks there and studied it. They didn't know what else to do with me. I'd been in the senior seminar, and they had very foolishly said that they didn't want to let me take my trip because of the confirmation hearings—I should say foolishly from my point of view, because it was a waste, but I suppose they couldn't run the risk that I'd be away if they wanted a confirmation hearing. So I knocked around, and they

had found a tutor, finally, and I had about four or five weeks with her, which was fairly intensive. But I'd done a certain amount before.

Q: You had done it before? And then how long did you continue at the post?

TIBBETTS: I continued at the post for about two years. I worked very hard on it, and I finally got it. I'm not a good linguist, but my Norwegian is good enough so that I can get by.

Q: I heard that you were very good in Norwegian.

TIBBETTS: Depends on whom you're talking to. [Laughter]

Q: How soon after you arrived did you present your credentials?

TIBBETTS: About three days, I think it took, or something like that.

Q: Can you remember the ceremony?

TIBBETTS: It was very simple. It's a delight. I became very fond of the king of Norway, because he was very relaxed. But his system was quite simple. You went on up in and handed a document to him, and I think he said, “I'm supposed to listen to a speech and to make one. But let's forget about it.”

So I said, “Thank you very much, Sir.”

I handed him—the president had given me a letter and that sort of business, and I handed it to him, and he put it on the desk, which was very large and very cluttered. I wonder if they ever found it. But he's an intense reader, I discovered. It's one of the things that—we got along well. He's a great, as I say, reader.

Q: You didn't have to wear any special clothes?

TIBBETTS: No. I wore a black dress, I think, and a hat and gloves. That was what you wore.

Q: Very different from when Mrs. Harriman was—

TIBBETTS: Yes. They all had to go through this business. But—

Q: So much better.

TIBBETTS: He was wearing sort of a second—not his most elaborate uniform, but sort of a semi-uniform. The hat and gloves and so forth were my tribute to decorum, as well as the black dress, the basic black dress; and his uniform, as I say, was his.

Q: Did you take part of your staff with you?

TIBBETTS: No. You went by yourself. That was another good thing about it, because he'd worked—you see, he'd been in the business for some time. And he'd found that this went more easily from his point of view. I don't blame him.

Q: I don't either. Did you inherit any problems?

TIBBETTS: No. Well, there's always longstanding shipping problems. The great problem I had, I don't think I inherited as much but it just developed, was the Vietnam War and the impact on Norwegian opinion. And that was a continuing issue, but not a problem. There are always personnel problems around the post, but that's par for the course. And they're not necessarily ones you inherit.

The problem—and I think this is something which would happen in every post, whether or not you're ambassador—what happens is that when you replace someone, you're going to find you want to do things your way. You have to change the pattern of the way people work—you have to do it tactfully enough so that you don't seem to be critical, because you're going to arouse resentment and dislike; you have to do it firmly enough so that

they know you mean it; and you have to do it slowly enough so that you know what you're doing, but quickly enough so that it begins to take effect. And that's, perhaps, a little bit more with an ambassador than with anyone else. Mr. Wharton had been a very good man, but it was his last post before retirement. And, inevitably, I think I wanted to speed things up a little bit.

Q: What about your DCM [deputy chief of mission]? Did you inherit him or did you select him?

TIBBETTS: I inherited him and he went on—

Q: And this was Bovey?

TIBBETTS: No, no. I didn't inherit John. John Bovey was my choice. I inherited the then-DCM, who went on home leave at the end of November. And during the course of the home leave, the department decided—which pleased me, although I didn't have anything to do with the decision—that they were to change, and then I was able to pick my choice. Again, it was an older man that they were thinking of replacing. But they—the department—offered me a list of names. I wrote them a note and said, “Don't kid me. I've been in the business. These are the longstanding, well-known dogs. [Laughter] Why not give me someone from the list of good ones?” And they wrote and sent me a list from which I picked John Bovey—the second list.

Q: You knew him before?

TIBBETTS: I knew John. When I was in NATO matters, John was working in French North African affairs.

Q: I see. Well now, when you got him, did you spell out his role, or did it evolve? You know, usually one is the “heavy”—

TIBBETTS: Both. Because whatever you say to him about the way in which I work isn't going—he's going to learn how I work. We knew each other quite well. We talked back and forth with considerable candor, of course. That's the beauty of having an old friend, is that you really—you know, you can shut the door and you speak as friends. And that's very important, because there's always so many people running around who do everything you tell them to, whether it's right or not. But I think the role works out with special—evolves—there's certain things I—the ambassador has to do certain things, some of which are deadly dull.

Q: Right, right. But did one of you become the "comforter" and one of you become the "heavy," so to speak?

TIBBETTS: No. I don't think we ran it in quite that way, because I can be quite sharp, and I've never had any problem anywhere in making my writ run, and John is the same way, too.

Q: I see.

TIBBETTS: And I don't think we disagreed much on things. If he—if I were going to speak sharply to someone on something and I told John in advance, we'd work it out in advance. But he certainly would never comfort anyone against my—

Q: Oh, no. No, no.

TIBBETTS: —criticism. No, no. That's right, no.

Q: But I often notice that they do.

TIBBETTS: Yes, that sometimes happens.

Q: Did you encounter any problems of morale—alcoholism, incompetence, this sort of thing?

TIBBETTS: I think there was a case in the code room, a young man who had had problems getting on. And then there were tangential problems of alcoholism, if you can call it that. Some of the younger Marines—the Marine House—they used to have a party every Friday night. There were about six of them; that's partly the problem; there weren't enough of them.

Q: Yes.

TIBBETTS: Many Scandinavians, of course, even the purest of the Norwegians, can have a great susceptibility to strong drink. And as the parties—one or two incidents took place, and so we just shut off the parties and said “Nothing doing.” And I don't know whether they took it badly or not. They seemed to take it all right.

Q: Yes. You didn't have these problems of family split-ups and all that which seem to be so rampant?

TIBBETTS: There were some, but that was none of my business. You know, there was nothing that I was going to do. If a family wasn't getting along, there wasn't anything I was going to say to either one of them that could make the slightest amount of difference.

Q: No. And you didn't have to evacuate anybody?

TIBBETTS: Not that I remember. One or two people chose—the wife went away and didn't come back in one case, but that's, as I say, not the type of thing I could affect.

Q: I see. Because that seems to be a growing problem now, especially in—not so much in Europe. How often did you have staff meetings?

TIBBETTS: I had heads-of-section meetings every single morning for about fifteen to twenty minutes, and a regular staff meeting once a week.

Q: That's the country team?

TIBBETTS: Yes. The country—no. No, I don't call it the country team. I guess the heads of section would be country team, but I didn't include the chief MAAG [Military Assistance Advisory Group] most of the time because he was different. But I had the full officers' staff—well, not all the consuls or administrative officers, but some chosen representatives from each section—once a week.

But I have always found, though—and I learned this, of course, when I was working as a subordinate—that the small, early staff meeting, when you go over it with the section chiefs and so forth like that, saves a great deal of time. For them and for you. And the essence of being a superior, I think first of all, apart from knowing your business, is that the superior must move quickly enough so that he or she is never blocking the people below.

A lot of people have the problem that they can't do anything because Mr. X hasn't approved their paper yet, so they're just spinning their wheels. Well, if you're in the position of being Mr. or Ms. X, get that out of the way and put them to work, and then go on to do what you want to do. And that works very well.

Q: Yes. What was the style of these meetings? Collegial, or was it more authoritarian?

TIBBETTS: It's a mixture. I led the meeting and I asked the questions, and I'm authoritarian in a sense I have a certain respect for my own opinions and judgment. On the other hand, I was not so far away from the business that I couldn't remember how it worked. And I think the section chiefs, almost without exception, dealt with me very easily

and frankly. I knew the business, and I'm not so difficult a personality that they couldn't work with it.

Q: That they couldn't do it, yes.

TIBBETTS: I never felt the need to throw my weight around, though. I've always been relatively self-confident and assured in authority.

Q: How long did it take you before you felt at home? Right away, two months, one month?

TIBBETTS: You go in stages in any post. You feel at home in certain respects within two weeks. At the end of six months, you realize how little you knew. At the end of a year, you should know everything.

Q: Were you able to develop a close relationship with the Norwegian head of state?

TIBBETTS: Well, the head of state, the king, developed as close as you need to. But the king's role is not very much involved in government. I had a close enough relationship—I had a very close relationship with the two foreign ministers with whom I worked. But that's—an American ambassador who doesn't have a good relationship with Norwegians is out of his mind. I mean—because they're eager to—the American ambassador in a country like that is so important because the United States is important. I had a good enough relationship with the prime minister, but neither one of them spoke English at that point—the two with whom I worked—so that was less productive, until I got so I could get along in Norwegian.

Q: Yes. What about the other members of the Cabinet?

TIBBETTS: I got along very well with the defense minister—I got to know very well indeed both defense ministers. See, I worked first [with] a Labor government, then Conservative, and I got to know both of them very well indeed. I got to know most of the cabinet members. I inevitably had less to do with the minister of women's welfare, or

something like that, but I got to know them all well enough. And I tried to entertain those that were receptive to it and that sort of thing.

But again, there's never any problem if you know what you're doing and if you are prepared to—well, Norwegians—in small, small countries, you always have to make certain adjustments, you know.

Q: Yes, of course. How well did you know the businessmen over there and the educators?

TIBBETTS: I knew the educators very well. I knew the businessmen quite well. I knew quite a lot of them depending, again, on the chamber of commerce work and what they did. It's always—for me personally, that's rather dull, the business people, because politically they're going to be very solidly behind you, and almost misleadingly so.

At the height of the Vietnam crisis, one of the businessmen said to me, “Now, don't worry, Ambassador. It's only the working people and the young people who feel this way.” Well, the “working people and the young people,” I mean, how do you feel—because the business community—so you have to go through the motions. But speaking to the Rotary Club and that sort of thing, you're speaking to the converted, which is what the problem was not at that time. But I went very faithfully. And a lot of them, as I say, have very good businesses and a lot of them are already very solidly in, and you're going through the motions.

Q: Yes. But did any of the chamber of commerce people actually come to you for advice?

TIBBETTS: Well, they came to the embassy. But they didn't need much advice. The average Norwegian who's doing business with this country—first of all, he probably—if he's in a big business, he spent ten or fifteen years' apprenticeship working in New York at something like shipping. He sent his son to Harvard Business School, and his son is now working in the office in New York.

Or the people who are doing things like exporting crystal or that sort of thing, they have had their lines into every big department store, boutique, Dansk place, or something, so there's no conceivable way I could advise them, really. And they already had the contacts, so—

Q: Sure. There wasn't any reason.

TIBBETTS: No reason for it.

Q: I remember the little anecdote about the Chinese ambassador and you. What about the Soviet Union?

TIBBETTS: Yes. They had an ambassador, a Mr. Lounkov; I think he's now the Russian ambassador to London. He was learning English when I was there, and he was always very eager to practice. He wasn't a bad fellow; he was sort of a mechanical little person. You have no idea what these people are really like, because in the official line—he told me one day when he was practicing his English at the diplomatic lunch on me that he had a son at Moscow University, and he was very worried because the boy wouldn't obey his grandmother, and I said, “Well, you know, you don't sound a bit like somebody from another world to me.”

He said, “Well, you know, I think we all have the same problems.”

And his wife didn't like Norway and so forth. We came and we went on official—but it depended on the state of relations as to—

Q: I see.

TIBBETTS: But personally, there was no problem. We danced very gaily together at one of the diplomatic parties—he's an excellent dancer. Russians, of course, have great sense of rhythm. And, as I say, you could be very—it could be very pleasant, actually.

Q: Do the Cubans have an ambassador there?

TIBBETTS: No, the Cubans didn't. They had someone in Stockholm, who came skulking over from time to time, but he never called on me, of course.

Q: Could you tell me how you divided your official contacts with your officers?

TIBBETTS: You mean, how we split up the things for them to do and for me to do?

Q: Yes. Well, how did you decide who would go to the foreign office? Or did you just assign certain people to it?

TIBBETTS: You see, it depended on the topics. Yes. And certain topics, sometimes I would say in the morning—I have a tendency to push on a little bit. But then I'd say, “Go and see him before the end of the week if this hasn't come through.” Because people sometimes say, “Well, I spoke to Mr. X last week, and he's going to get back to me.” Well, if you don't push them, they may take longer to get back. I push just to keep things moving.

But on certain questions, John would come in and he'd say, “This is getting difficult.” and “Do you want me to do this or should you?” And I'd say, well, sometimes yes and sometimes no.

Q: Sure. There weren't any you reserved just for yourself? Some ambassadors do that.

TIBBETTS: Yes, some of that. Sometimes you have to do that. We had a—I guess it's still classified—but there was a Norwegian contact for a long time that went on and attempted contact with a government with which we wished to talk through a Norwegian diplomat. [The government in question was Vietnam.]

When the foreign minister sent for me, he said that had to be just me. Well, of course, I told John, because that had to be. But I had to do the Norwegian translations, because

they would give me things that this man sent in Norwegian, and if I'd waited for them to translate into English, it would take forever. Also, I speak English better than they do.

So that sort of thing. And I did that myself. Eventually, after it had gone on, and at one point after about eight or nine months, it looked as though it might develop into something good. With the department's permission, I got Roz Ridgway, who was then a second secretary in the political section, and we brought her in to do this, simply because it's never wise to have something which is important in just one person's hands. [Rozanne Ridgway, then a junior officer became ambassador to Finland, August 1977 - February 1980; ambassador to East Germany, January 1983 - July 1985 and assistant secretary of state for European and Canadian affairs, July 1985 - January 1988.]

Q: That's true.

TIBBETTS: You know, you could—something can go amiss or you can be in a hurry or you're not available. And particularly, an ambassador is always out on some miserable thing. You know, the USIS [United States Information Service] might send me out to western Norway to speak to something, and I might be gone for eight hours, and something which I have to do, which could hold it up, comes in.

Q: Yes, sure. What steps did you take to ensure that your young officers received the proper training?

TIBBETTS: Well, I watched that closely, because I am a nut on training officers. And I was good at training them myself. Some of them are a very mixed bag, of course. Some of them, like Roz Ridgway, you didn't have to train. You know, it was her first political job, but you had no problem. Just give her a subject, and she'd watch me and watch John and then she'd do it. Some of the others, if I didn't like a despatch he'd written, I'd get him in myself; or I'd sometimes, after I'd talked with his section chief or something like that, we'd go through it.

I must admit, I didn't pay much attention to the young people in the consular section, because that's the one area of Foreign Service work in which I never did anything. The administrative work I know quite a lot about, unfortunately. I'm a good executive, but not an administrator—the paperwork. I think we talked—John and I worked on it, and we would decide privately which officer is good and which one less so. But we tried—I tried to have them at the house at parties, at dinner parties and not just cocktail parties, which are a nuisance, but dinner parties, and particularly those who had some language capability. And that, again, is great training for them if they're any good at all.

Q: Did you have any sort of setup, such as Phil Habib, for example, did, where he used to bring them in on Saturdays and sit them down and go over things with them? [Philip Habib, ambassador to South Korea at the time.]

TIBBETTS: No. I came in on Saturdays, and I saw them around. But—

Q: You didn't formalize it?

TIBBETTS: No. I soon had a good enough idea of the people in the political and the economic sections; we had a very good economic officer, and I read the work they did.

Q: Well, I gather you kept right on top of everything. Now, you have said in the Schlesinger transcript that you felt you had three major successes—in London, drafting messages; at the NATO, with the agreements and at state; and then as ambassador. Can you think—and this is a tiresome question, but I must do it—can you think of any way in which your being a woman contributed to these particular successes or made it more difficult?

TIBBETTS: No. I don't think that many things have ever been more difficult for me being a woman, and maybe it's because I was fortunate enough to land in the heart of the department. When I went to London, I went from, really, EUR in the political section in London. And I was always helped by the fact Frances Willis, who had been the great establishment woman, was a very good, close friend of mine when I hit London. She was

very wary at first; but when she saw that I wasn't going to do the sort of thing that she didn't think was right, she let me go pretty much on my own.

I was never—there are obvious things when you are a woman that you have to compromise and adjust on in the sense of—I think I've told this anecdote a million times, but when I was in the Congo, the consul general—I was doing economic work at the time, and the consul general was not much interested in it, fortunately for me. But there was a fancy men's business club known as the Cercle. And the consul general said to me, “I don't know how you'll do economic work; you can't get into the Cercle to talk to people.”

I said, “Well, I'll do it.” What's the point of making a remark like that?

Q: I know it.

TIBBETTS: Anyway, we had this report on how to establish a business in the Congo, and I was working on it. I sent the report in, and about six months after it had been in, the Department of Commerce sent me a long commendation. And the consul general was very surprised, and he said, “How did you do that? You couldn't go to the Cercle or the Rotary. How could you talk to these businessmen?”

I said, “Mr—, I've got to put you out of your misery sometime. I couldn't go to the Cercle and I couldn't go to the Rotary, but I went to see the men in their offices.” And he just sort of looked at me, because—

Q: What an idea!

TIBBETTS: Yes, what an idea! Because this is the way—the sort of thing you do, and you always make these sort of adjustments in problems. I never found anyone—if they didn't like to deal with a woman—you see, you're representing the United States; the country is so important. They don't care about you one way or the other, but they feel

about the United States. Maybe they grumbled to themselves, but they're going to grumble to themselves one way or the other.

Was I helped? Well, obviously I was helped when I came to be named an ambassador. As I say, I've given my estimate that I was five years ahead of my time.

Q: Sure, but you would have gotten it anyway.

TIBBETTS: Well, I believe I would have gotten it. The other people with me who were right along with me in class did get it within three to five years afterwards. And so I was helped. I think that if the woman ambassador is ever going to amount to anything—and, obviously, we're going to have more women ambassadors, and it's hard to look at the group now and see them as a whole—you've got to say not “Are they women ambassadors?” but “Are they good ambassadors?”

Q: Exactly.

TIBBETTS: Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, when I'd be interviewed by some women's page thing, you'd get down to the fact they'd be asking you questions not about being a woman ambassador, but what it's like to be an ambassador; that's what it amounts to.

They say, “What do you need to be a woman ambassador?”

And I also said, “Well, you need to be fairly intelligent, and you need a good digestion and a strong constitution.” There I'm not as good as the man; I'm strong enough, but I couldn't take the late, late hours and heavy entertaining business. This is hard for me.

Q: Yes.

TIBBETTS: Four or five days, because you just don't have the—I didn't have the weight, so to speak, or the bone structure to take it.

Q: Yes, and yet you said in the Congo you weathered that better than some of the men.

TIBBETTS: Yes, I did. But in the Congo, it wasn't a question—just life in the Congo wasn't that easy; and the type of things that you had, the tropical problems and so forth—it's not the question of heavy entertaining. I mean, if I had to go to four or five dinner parties in a week, I was very much worn out.

Q: It ruins the digestion.

TIBBETTS: Digestion, that's right.

Well, let me get back to—as I say, the question of a woman ambassador is not, “Is she a good woman ambassador?” but “Is she a good ambassador?” That's the only point that matters. And it's going to matter. As I say, it's the only way, basically, in which they should be judged.

Q: Yes. Well, there are those who think that women have more intuition than men.

TIBBETTS: I think women have a different type of intuition.

Q: Different type?

TIBBETTS: I was always helped as a political reporter, because men aren't terribly observant, as every woman knows, and women are more observant. And that is, if you know how to use it—

Q: Catch the nuances.

TIBBETTS: Oh, the nuances. Well, this is an anecdote I've told and repeated before, but when I was in Brussels—the constant argument in Belgium is the question of the language, etc., and it's of importance to us only because it is a governing factor in Belgian politics. Ambassador MacArthur said to me, “Do we fuss about this too much?”

I said, “If your friend, Spaak [Paul-Henri Spaak, Foreign Minister], is out on his ear next week because of a vote in the language issue, you'll be interested.” He said, “Well, that's true.”

One of the areas which was of most concern was the Waterloo district. There was a large supermarket in that district, and one morning I said to the young men who worked for me (there were three of them), one Monday morning I said, “Did you all go to the Libre Service Supermarket?” And they said, “Yes.”

I said, “What language were they talking?” Because that was the issue in the paper night and day—the election was coming up—was what was the language in Waterloo. And they all looked at me. Not one of them knew.

I said, “Well, when the people were telling the children not to get in the candy or buying meat?” No, they'd been thinking of themselves, which is what young men tend to do.

Q: Sure.

TIBBETTS: And I said, “Well, just for an experiment . . .” And I called up their wives, and every one of their wives could tell me what the majority of the people were speaking.

Q: Is that right?

TIBBETTS: Well, they said immediately that they were all speaking French. Some of them were Flemish people speaking French. Now, as I say, the men were wandering around, thinking of themselves; that's the sort of thing they tend to do. And if you had said to them, “Go out and report,” if I said to them on May Day, and the Socialists are having a parade, “Go downtown and look for this and this and this and this and this,” they'd all come back with it. But if you didn't say, they'd all go down and watch the parade, but they wouldn't pick up some of these things.

But that's why you train them. After they'd worked for me, then they knew what I wanted. Whether or not they thought I was justified is a different question. I think women's intuitions are very good. On the other hand, you've got to watch it, in this sense that your intuitions are very good, but if you're dealing with men—after all, it's their opinions and their views which are governing them; that is, if you're dealing with a foreign man and you want to know what he is thinking, you apply your woman's intuition to what sort of a person he is and what it is, but don't forget what the optic is from which he is looking.

Q: That's true.

TIBBETTS: So you can't overdo it. I mean, you can't read things into it which aren't there, and that sort of thing.

Q: But I seem to remember when you came back from the Congo and you predicted great problems if things weren't done, didn't that—wasn't that sort of a novel idea in the department?

TIBBETTS: Oh, yes. They all thought that I was—but that wasn't because I was a woman; that was because I was one of the better trained officers that had been sent to the Congo. Thirty years ago, the people they were sending to Africa were not always the outstanding officers in the Foreign Service by any means. And also I'm articulate, so when I was debriefed, I wasn't afraid to say what I thought.

I had a lot of friends in the Congo that the consul general didn't have, because I made friends with the professors at the university. He was strictly—the consul general, and this is inevitable in his position; I mean, you can't criticize anyone—was strictly in the Rotary, upper businessman class, and the governor general and so forth. What the governor general tells you is what he thinks the United States government is going to be interested in hearing.

I had a lot of friends at the university. One day a young man came in the office, and he said he'd written an article about some sociological researches he'd made in the eastern Congo and he wanted it translated. It had been accepted by a journal in Great Britain, and they had told him he had to have an English translation. But like many people, he could speak English well, but he couldn't write it. He'd gone to the British consulate and they had said, “Don't waste our time.” And he wanted to know if I'd recommend a translator. Well, I was interested in the nature of the article, and I said, “I'll do it myself.”

He said, “Well, you're not professionally trained.”

I said, “Try me.”

And I made the translation, and I was very interested in the substance of the article. He sent it off to the British Institute, by which it was accepted; and from then on we were friends. He was a professor at the university. And that led—one thing leads to another. So I think I had much better contacts.

Q: And they didn't tell you what they thought the United States wanted to hear.

TIBBETTS: Well, they had no use for diplomats; they thought we were all sort of stupid—and we've had some that were. Really, in the not-too-distant past, in Africa at that time we'd had some real prizes. I mean, the Congo wasn't the place in those days—African posts weren't staffed well.

Q: Well, you know, as a bright woman, I suppose you got it from both sides, didn't you? Or am I wrong? That women who were not as bright as you wanted to use the women's issue to get ahead instead of—

TIBBETTS: Yes, I did get it from both sides in a way. When I first went to London and Frances Willis invited me out to tea, she asked me if I was much interested in the women's issue, which, in 1949, was not very burning. [Frances Willis, political officer at American

embassy in London and later one of Tibbetts's predecessors as ambassador to Norway, June 1957 - May 1961.]

I said, “No.” I'd never paid much attention to it, because I'd always been too interested in getting ahead on what I was doing, and when I was in college at Bryn Mawr, everyone was a woman. It was the stronghold. I mean, the question never would arise. And I just wasn't much interested.

She said it had been her experience, and she would give me some advice, which was that you did most for women by becoming a competent officer. Well, that's what I was interested in anyway, so to that I was receptive; she was pushing at an open door.

When I first went to Brussels, I was replacing Stanley Cleveland, who was a very old friend of mine; it was as head of the political section. And Stanley said to me, “Your problem is not going to come from any of the men at the embassy. You're an old EUR hand, and that's what they like.” But he said, “One of the women in one of the other sections has been agitating for two or three years on the grounds that she's not a section chief because she's a woman. And to have someone—a woman—come in as section chief, that's going to give you problems.”

Q: Did it?

TIBBETTS: In the sense that—although we personally got along well,—she was always completely convinced that what had worked for me had not worked for her. She would have liked to use the woman issue very hard.

Q: Yes.

TIBBETTS: I've never been sympathetic with it, because I think a woman has to be competent to get there.

Q: Exactly.

TIBBETTS: When Alison Palmer was suing years ago, [a class action lawsuit against the Department of State charging discrimination toward women] I could see she probably hadn't had much political work, but there were some women who had been in political work for so long that she wasn't going at it the right way. I mean, there were other reasons, I thought. That was my opinion.

Q: She still is suing, you know.

TIBBETTS: Oh, yes, I know. But by that time, it was perfectly possible; and it was always possible if you were lucky, perhaps. And then again, when I was named ambassador and I went over to the White House to see the president, I was waiting in the anteroom and an aide to Esther Peterson, who was the consumers' advisor, came in. Esther Peterson is a very intelligent woman. Boy, she was one of the really important people! And this aide said to me, “You know, when you were named, the great outcry, the huge outcry, came from all these women's groups—BPW [Business and Professional Women], AAUW [American Association of University Women], Democratic Women, all of these outfits—because you had nothing to do with them.”

Their argument had been that since I, Margaret Joy Tibbetts, hadn't paid my dues, so to speak, by working in the feminist movements and the Democratic National Women's Committee, I didn't deserve to be named; Esther Peterson had sent a note to the president that said, “Don't be foolish. How could you say that the only way to have a woman get ahead is to work through this routine? The point is, you want to name a competent woman.”

Well, the president couldn't have cared less one way or the other. This was a State Department thing. There was a little bit of that type of resentment added to the fires, but never, I think, enough to bother me.

Q: Well, I suppose it's too threatening to women to admit that they are not good enough to get it. That applies whether they are women or men, you know?

TIBBETTS: Well, I don't know. I don't think that type of—since I'm a beneficiary, I shouldn't be critical, but it was the same way when they used to have that Federal Women's Award. I always felt that was an insult. You shouldn't nominate someone for being a good woman; you should nominate someone for being a good officer. And the terrible thing is that most of the women who won the Federal Women's Award were outstanding. They shouldn't have been given the Women's Award; they should have been given the Medal of Freedom. I don't mean people like me, but I mean some of the people in the—

Q: Who gives that?

TIBBETTS: Well, they discontinued it about six or seven years ago because it is not consistent with the pattern of the times. But it was something that started in the sixties, and every agency would nominate, and then six or seven were chosen.

In the State Department, I think we all went through the routine—Carol [Laise] and everybody else. But it didn't matter so much in the State Department, because we were more interested in our own rewards. But if you were an outstanding woman in something like the Public Health or something, this might be the only recognition you'd get. And some of those women, as I say, were so outstanding that to give them this award and say they were the best women in this department was an insult for them.

Q: Absolutely. About being an ambassador, what's the best part of the job?

TIBBETTS: Well, I started as a working officer, and I liked the working part of the job. I like the political work; I enjoyed the fact there was enough substantive work in Norway to keep me interested and seeing people. At the same time, I must admit that I sometimes felt envious when I looked at my younger colleagues and I was sitting there next to the Lord

Mayor or someone like that, absolutely trapped, and they were out circulating and talking with the interesting people. That's the part of the job which I liked.

Q: And the worst part?

TIBBETTS: Oh, there's a great deal of the social life that is terribly dull. You have Latin-American parties, for example. Not that there's anything wrong with the Latin-Americans, but in Oslo, they're not terribly important, to come right down to it, and you're just putting in a great deal of time there simply because they'd be hurt if you didn't. And there's a great deal of that sort of thing.

Q: Do you feel it's sort of a wasting of your time?

TIBBETTS: No, because it's important to the people. That's what I'm paid for. But I personally was not as interested in some of the social life. I wasn't as interested in the Norwegian-American Women's Club as I might have been—that type of thing. I wasn't as interested in the chamber of commerce luncheons or all of these things, but you have to do it, and I have to be interested. Perhaps the hardest thing is that you have to be turned on all the time, whether or not the function is worth it.

Q: And you're on display all the time.

TIBBETTS: You're on display. And, as I say, you're constantly turned on, so you have to be just as enthusiastic about going through the sixteenth kindergarten school as you do about the first. And you have to watch that; if you're not enthusiastic. I know enough to do that.

The other thing, when you're out traveling around, which is very valuable, you must do it—the display angle. You must make things move along; otherwise, you can spend days and days and days going through. But you must do it in such a way that they don't think you're hurrying.

Q: It's quite an art.

TIBBETTS: Yes. It's something you have to learn to do. And you have to learn that your own staff will sometimes over schedule you or under schedule you, that type of thing. But you work it out.

Q: An ambassador needs diplomatic, managerial, and leadership skills. How would you rate yourself on these three qualities?

TIBBETTS: I think I was quite good in all of them. I had a considerable amount of diplomatic and political experience, and I had been extraordinarily well trained in the Foreign Service techniques, and I hope I didn't lose them along the way.

Managerial, yes. I'm a good manager. As I say, I'm not an administrator in the sense that you would want me to take the index numbers off the mechanical equipment, but I can tell you exactly how to get the people working. Leadership, yes. I'm quite good in the sense you have to make the staff interested in what they're doing. That doesn't mean I'm any better than anyone else at coping with the weak sister or the unenthusiastic person, but sometimes you have to learn to compensate; you have to take two people to do the job which one could do in the sense that one person may be outgoing and like to meet people, and the other person less so; you have to combine them.

Q: Right.

TIBBETTS: But I'm pretty good at handling the question of getting the staff interested and enthusiastic. I think morale at the embassy was good; at least all the inspectors said it was.

Q: Did they? The inspectors, you say, rated you highly on morale. They rated the whole post so, all the workings of the post as “good”?

TIBBETTS: Yes. I think I had two or three inspections when I was there. I was there nearly five years; I had at least two, and I think I had three—I had two and a half inspections, because somebody came just for a briefing. Yes, I never heard any serious criticism on any of the aspects, that I knew of.

Q: Could you give me your evaluation of the UN?

TIBBETTS: The UN as an organization? Well, of course, in the early days it was much more important than it is now. It's not entirely useless, of course. In fact, it has certain—its potential in the peacekeeping role is still very much there; it depends upon the way in which the UN is run and administered.

It's very fashionable to say that the UN has become a useless sort of organization which is criticized so much now because it has too many, many people in it, and some of them are irresponsible. That's true to a certain extent. I think we bear a certain amount of responsibility in the sense that we tried very hard to politicize the UN in our way thirty-five years ago. And when the balance shifted, we're now the people who are on the other end of it, and I think that's our responsibility. There were people at that time who said this would happen.

But I personally don't like serving around there, because it's a world in which the procedure is so difficult and important and all these things, and the more important things tend to be settled somewhere else. But I think it's the nature of such a large organization.

Q: What do you think about the effect on State of the national security advisor and the national security group?

TIBBETTS: Well, I think the secretary of state, of course, must be the most important advisor to the president. We went through the whole Kissinger business, about which I can't say anything that other people haven't said at much greater length. I think a great

many of the problems the State Department has, some of it has brought on itself by its own poor administration.

Q: Yes.

TIBBETTS: Which is, to a certain extent, its own fault; because for so many years the important people just haven't really paid the sort of attention to administration they should, and then they wonder why it all goes wrong. And by “attention,” I mean not just dipping in and out.

I think the McCarthy period some thirty-odd years ago was very, very damaging—left it very damaged. It's like a car that's been in an accident; you repair it, but somehow it's never quite the same. Because certainly the people who were in the Foreign Service, some of our most able people, were so badly hurt. Then for years and years and years, you had a lot of able people who were sounding off, mouthing policies in which they didn't really necessarily believe, simply because it was fatal not to say the right thing, so to speak. And I think that was very bad. [Senator McCarthy, in his crusade against Communists in the government, claimed that the Department of State was a haven for many, and his followers took drastic measures to discover and root them out.]

But I think the worst thing about the National Security Council's staff growth is removing the State Department people from being the people who are most often consulted, because when you get right down to it, it's the people in State who should know not to make the mistakes. That is, they know the people and they don't mess up the prime minister's name and that sort of thing. But you can't take able people and confine them to jobs like drawing up guests lists for the president's dinner party or writing toasts and so forth and expect them to be happy with it.

Robert Kennedy, I think, in one of his books—the book on the Cuban Crisis—expressed great surprise because Llewellyn Thompson spoke so knowingly about the Soviet Union. Well, it didn't cross his mind Thompson was the only one in the room that had ever been

there and ever knew anything about it. That's the thing. The Kennedys bear their share of blame in the whole proceeding. [Llewellyn Thompson was twice ambassador to the Soviet Union.]

Q: Yes. Carol Laise says each new administration has to reinvent the wheel. [Carol Laise, ambassador to Nepal, December 1966 - June 1973, director of the Foreign Service, April 1975 - December 1977.]

TIBBETTS: Yes, and she's absolutely right. You go through it. Mr.[Secretary John Foster] Dulles, when he came in, was very scornful. When he left, he spoke well and tried to be helpful. The fact is, the damage had been done. The Kennedys went through the same routine. They all not only reinvent the wheel, but somehow it takes a little bit longer each time.

Q: Yes. Do you think the State Department missed the boat after World War II when it didn't pick up the ball and new agencies started filling in the void, so that now at every mission you have AID, USIS . . .

TIBBETTS: Well, some of it wasn't the State Department's fault. I think the State Department certainly didn't react easily. But I think the whole question of the intelligence agencies—I don't think the State Department was ever given the choice of absorbing the CIA.

Q: No.

TIBBETTS: This is something in which I think State never had a chance and in which most people in State have been right from the beginning. But it didn't do you any good.

But I do not think that the State Department was prepared to pick up on a lot of things. I have never seen, in any post in which I've operated, the department's having any trouble dealing with the information agency. I mean, you have to be a pretty feeble political

officer not to be able to bring the press attach# into line within five minutes. Most of the information agency people certainly want State Department approval—very badly. And the same with the cultural officer.

I don't think State has ever had much trouble with the—well, the AID mission has been a question of competence, not of political balking. Basically, if you know your business, the ambassador and the DCM and the head of the economic section get problems with Commerce and Agriculture worked through.

Q: They do? It doesn't matter that they're really reporting back to Commerce or whichever?

TIBBETTS: No. You get them worked into it so that you educate them to your point of view, so that when the secretary of agriculture comes through, the local man has some glimmering of the local scene, as well as the necessity for selling whatever it is.

Q: Well, do you see in the future a watering-down even more of State's role? Because at any given embassy now, State is often in the minority.

TIBBETTS: Yes, they are in a minority. The question of State's role though—yes, you're in the minority, but it isn't numbers that count; it's the cards in your hand. And there again, if the ambassador and the DCM and the section chiefs know their business and aren't afraid to go at it and are the right sort of people—but that depends on the appointments.

Q: You made the point that young, bright people are going to go where the action is.

TIBBETTS: Yes. Young, bright people are.

Q: So as long as it's in state . . .

TIBBETTS: If the action is still in State, the great weapon State still has is that, basically, it's the State Department officer who becomes an ambassador. But if the day ever dawns

when it's possible for the CIA section chief to become the ambassador, or the information officer and so forth—but basically now it usually isn't. You work as a station chief, as they call them, and you work along, and then you find yourself at fifty-two or fifty-three, say, station chief, period; whereas, your State colleague has the post.

I haven't been in the business for ten years or so, but some of the CIA people I knew were people who'd failed the Foreign Service exam. This question of the station chief was very irritating to some of them. Today I don't know. But no, I think the State people—yes, they're going to be in the minority, but if they're competent and if they get the right sort of support—in these days, it has to be from the secretary of state.

Q: So you don't feel that it's inevitable that the role of State is going to decline?

TIBBETTS: The role of State has so declined within the past twenty years or so for a number of reasons—for the past thirty years, I should say. I don't think it is inevitable. It doesn't mean it isn't likely or it isn't possible. I don't know; it all depends on whom we get as secretaries of state and how the president regards them and whether or not he's willing to listen to them. I resented very much, as did most people in the State Department, that President Nixon was not always interested in advice from people in the State Department. It wasn't just Kissinger; it was Nixon, and he was a very intelligent president, indeed. But that wasn't anything you could do much about at the time.

Q: Yes.

TIBBETTS: I think State people have to be just as competent as they can, and accept the fact that they're going to get a certain amount of criticism one way or the other, but just ride it out. But you have to be competent.

Q: Absolutely. Now, you had the threat from people who were against the Vietnam War in front of your embassy, but you didn't have any of this terrorism at that time, of course.

TIBBETTS: No, we didn't have any terrorism. Terrorism in Norway is if anybody throws a rock through the window, it's headlines for months. No, we didn't have terrorism, and I can't imagine that Scandinavia will ever become a very fertile field for it. What you had was constant agitation and editorializing and people buttonholing you at parties and a great many people whom you respect very much telling you, sadly, that they thought the United States was on the wrong track, and students and so forth. But the only thing to do is to grit our teeth and ride it out and keep cool.

Q: I thought the way you handled it was very, very good.

TIBBETTS: Well, I thank you very much. I always insisted, as you know, don't make too much about it. If somebody breaks a window, as they did from time to time, get the glaziers right in and repair it, and don't talk about it.

Q: And offer them coffee.

TIBBETTS: Yes. That's right. Keep it interesting.

Q: And photograph it. I liked that.

TIBBETTS: That's right, yes.

Q: How was your embassy protected? Just your six marines?

TIBBETTS: Just the six marines. And we didn't need anything more. It would be terrible if we ever get to the stage where everything is an armed-camp type of thing. It's one of the depressing things about the Soviet embassy. I went to call—I've forgotten what for; it was something in the diplomatic corps—and to get into the Soviet embassy was practically like invading Hitler's bunker, and it makes a frightful impression.

Q: Of course it does. It must be terrible to live that way, terrible. Getting back to your working in the embassy, where did you place the greatest emphasis yourself?

TIBBETTS: On the work.

Q: Political work?

TIBBETTS: Political, economic. You have to weigh them. We didn't have administrative problems any more than anything else. The consular work—you have to watch consular work always, because some of the stuff that goes on can be so deadly dull. If you don't pay attention to it, it's going to come up and hit you. Some jackass in the visa section will turn someone down who turns out to be head of the political science department at the university. You have to watch this sort of thing. You have to watch it very carefully. So that's why you get the consular section in on your staff meetings. You see him [the consul] enough so that you find out what's happening.

Q: What about your consulate? Consulate general, was it, at Bergen?

TIBBETTS: No, we didn't have any post outside. We had a man at Tromso, but he didn't do consular work; he was an information officer. There wasn't any at Bergen.

Q: I see. Well, of the three areas—representation, reporting, and negotiating—which are the duties of an ambassador, how did you divide that up?

TIBBETTS: I think reporting and negotiation I did more. Representation I did as a pro forma thing. I did what I had to do and what I thought was wise, but I certainly didn't do any more than I had to do, and I always left promptly. That's one good thing about me; you could count upon the fact that at 11:00 I was up like a shot and out. Reporting and negotiation—reporting, you go along; you have to watch it. I entertained enough to try to meet all of my obligations. I split up the money. Of course, I had the bulk of the money. You certainly don't get as much as you spend. There's always a certain amount that you

can't collect for, but you have to do it anyway, like American Field Service students or that sort of thing. I'm not saying that they don't deserve it, and they're sometimes more interesting than the others, but it gets to be quite a lot of it. It gets to be a terrible nuisance.

Q: And you were out of pocket on these things?

TIBBETTS: Yes, to a certain extent. You just have to do it, because there's no way—I mean, I don't have the sort of conscience where I could say that you have, say, forty American Fields Service students and three Norwegians. That's not the sort of party I'm going to be able to charge off, as far as I'm concerned. So you just take that sort of thing.

Q: I see what you mean. How much of your time was spent actually running the mission, Ambassador?

TIBBETTS: Running the mission?

Q: Or did you have a good admin officer who could keep things ticking over?

TIBBETTS: I had a good admin officer. You know, the tendency is always, if anything goes wrong, the ambassador is always taken care of. So if everybody else's car breaks down, I still have a car. Well, I'm experienced enough that I can watch to make sure that isn't happening. But I could always count on John [Bovey] and others to tell me if something was breaking down for someone else, because, as I say, I knew them well enough. And John would come right in and say that the system's gone to hell on this and that. But the admin officers were basically very good.

Q: How about the budget? Did they do that, or did you work with them on that?

TIBBETTS: They prepared the budget and I went over it. There's where my Congo experience, where I was a budget and fiscal officer, was very good. It's very tedious work. But on the other hand, let me tell you right now, there's no satisfaction that can equal really

knowing what goes on. And I could do it. I mean, I could say, “This is too much on that or too much on that.”

Q: So that was very useful. What about the quality of your State personnel?

TIBBETTS: My State personnel were excellent. Almost all of them. Some were weeded out. The Department had a tendency to say that I have only Scandinavian speakers. That isn't necessarily—you want good officers, and let them learn the language. But basically I didn't have any problems. They were good people.

Q: What about your other agencies?

TIBBETTS: I think the quality of the CIA, basically, some were more bright than others but all acceptable. I had a number of the younger officers I got along with very well. They all were excellent linguists; I'll say this for the agency.

Q: Were they?

TIBBETTS: Yes. Excellent linguists. And they handled well certain things; we had a defector case that they handled very well. They were smart enough to keep always in very close touch with the Norwegians and with us. I don't mean a defector from the Norwegians; I mean a defector from one of the satellite embassies. The USIS personnel were some good, some less so; some excellent ones, and some less good.

Q: Mixed bag. There was no AID at that time, was there?

TIBBETTS: No, there was no AID, and we didn't need it. We had a lot of military aid; the MAAG was very big, because, you see, Norway, being in NATO, was qualified. I got along well enough with the MAAG.

Q: Did Washington give you a free hand?

TIBBETTS: They gave me quite a free hand. Anything. But on the other hand, I—again, all these years of experience—if I didn't know when to check in and check out, I would have been very foolish indeed.

Q: Of course. Do you feel you got adequate policy guidance from the department?

TIBBETTS: Yes. Oh, yes. No question about it. Anything I wanted to know, I could pinpoint the sort of question and put it in to them. But you have to know how to write your messages. No, I had no problem; no question at all.

Q: You had a lot—you had visiting VIPs.

TIBBETTS: Yes, we had visiting—

Q: Codels [congressional delegations].

TIBBETTS: Yes. We had codels; we had a fair number of codels. Some are an asset and some aren't.

Q: You were in London at the time the McCarthy boys came through? [Roy Cohn and David Schine were investigators for Sen. McCarthy who checked American embassies in Europe looking for Communists.]

TIBBETTS: Yes, I was. I didn't see them. They hit very hard at others. They really hit in the political section. The people who worked in Far Eastern affairs—I was a good friend of Arthur Ringwalt's, and he, I think, spent thirteen years in London simply because the department didn't dare transfer him somewhere else. He was the one most affected. But I think Julius Holmes, our minister, dealt with them fairly sharply, to the extent that he could. Julius did a great deal to protect the people in the embassy. He was very, very good at that.

I learned a lot from watching Julius. You're not conscious of learning it, because as a second secretary, it would have been presumptuous. But he certainly protected the people in the embassy to a great extent. I don't mean shielding us from being asked questions or anything like that, but his attitude was that if your conscience is clear, you can go anywhere in the world. This group has a clear conscience. And that gives you a great deal of morale booster.

Q: Of course. He didn't knuckle under the way so many did. Getting back to Norway, what was your relationship with the local press? Did they follow you around?

TIBBETTS: Yes, and I got along very well with almost all of them as individuals. Even the papers that—you know, you get to know which papers are and are not troublesome. But the individual reporter, that doesn't necessarily mean that he reflects his paper's attitude. Or if he does reflect his paper's attitude, you still deal with him openly, as you do with anyone else. Just be careful what you say. But you should be careful anyway. Sometimes the papers that can do you the most harm are the ones that want to be too friendly, you know. But I got along pretty well with the working press.

Q: And they didn't patronize you—ask stupid questions?

TIBBETTS: No.

Q: Ask you for your favorite menu?

TIBBETTS: The women's pages do, but I got out of that fairly early in the routine. The press attach#, when I first came, had scheduled tons and tons of interviews, and “What's your favorite menu?” and that sort of thing with the women's pages, and after about two of them, I said, “Nothing doing.”

He said, “You know, we can get unlimited coverage.”

And I said, “No. It bores me stiff, and that's not the way I want to play it.” And I got out of that.

Q: Of course, you were there at the time of Vietnam. Did you find the press hostile?

TIBBETTS: Parts of the press, of course, if it's the paper's policy. They weren't hostile to me as an individual, but they were certainly hostile to U.S. policy.

Q: And they twisted what you said? Or were they fair? How did you feel about that?

TIBBETTS: I think they were basically fair. You had to make sure that you stated it in very simple terms, particularly if you're stating it to people with whom English is not the natural language. But I never had any feeling that they twisted anything. They could writhe with rage and jump over what the president said at some things.

Q: What about the U.S. press? Did many of them come through?

TIBBETTS: No. They paid very little attention. The only people who ever came through to speak of were the Wall Street Journal and the New York Times. Oh, and then there was—well, I used to see quite a lot of the man from the Economist, who came through from Brussels when the Scandinavians were having a discussion of the Nordic Council. Anthony Lewis used to come through from the New York Times about twice a year. He was then stationed in Paris. The Wall Street Journal came up about once a year to check on things.

Q: Would they check in with the embassy?

TIBBETTS: Yes. They always came and saw me. I'd have about an hour with them.

Q: How about consular matters? Were they a large part of the problems at the post?

TIBBETTS: They were a large part of the work, because a great many Norwegians reside in the United States and are back and forth, and social security and that sort of thing. Visas aren't required, basically, anymore, but there's shipping. Yes, you have a good deal of work. I think we had about five or six American officers and, oh, I guess eight or nine locals, something like that.

Q: What about intra-mission rivalries? Did you have much problem with that?

TIBBETTS: Well, you have to watch the people. Some of the people in the economic section thought the political section was getting too much attention, etc., etc. But you watch that. No, nothing serious, nothing serious at all.

Q: What health facilities did you have at your mission?

TIBBETTS: Oh, Norway's superb. No problem. There was a U.S. Air Force—I won't say hospital, but a medical officer. You see, there's a group of U.S. personnel stationed at the NATO headquarters outside, so there was a school and everything like that. They were all out there. They weren't under me, but we had, in effect, relations. They were responsible to me. I mean, they weren't part of the embassy staff, but if something happened, I had to respond. We had that, and we had access to the facilities in Germany, all the hospitals, and the Norwegian facilities were very good. There was no question.

Q: Did you yourself have any serious health problems while you were there?

TIBBETTS: No.

Q: Did your people use the U.S. army facilities or local facilities?

TIBBETTS: Most people went out to the [U.S.] Air Force. We had to go through this routine of being checked by the Air Force. If there was any question, they sent them down to Frankfurt or something like that.

Q: I see. Now, getting back to women's issues, what about the wives at the post? What sort of thing did they do to keep themselves busy?

TIBBETTS: Well, they were pretty good. And I liked the wives very, very well; basically got along with them. Some of them I liked better than others, of course.

Q: Sure.

TIBBETTS: The young ones all had families. It's a great place for families. Scandinavians are very good, and close. There was a great deal of skiing and that sort of thing, which is all, I think, excellent. And there was a school, the American School at the Kols#s Base, where there were, I guess, 3,000 Americans all in all stationed there. A lot of them went in on the school. The kids went up through what I used to call junior high—whatever it is now; they call it middle school or something like that. The women were always doing things out there, which is good. I thought we had a very good situation. There wasn't any alcoholism problem to speak of.

What you have to watch in a post like that is women who get bored. Actually, if you are lucky, you're going to get people who are so delighted to be sent there. We had people come in from Africa or something. I mean, a post where everything's clean and nice and they get along well with their neighbors and the kids were taken care of. They were ecstatic. The older women weren't so hot on skiing, but there was a certain amount of—again, they liked it because you had social activity, but you didn't have too much. And I was relatively easy in the sense I didn't expect anything of them.

Now, I think that some of them would have liked a bit more direction or participation, or fashion shows or that sort of thing. But they can go somewhere else. On the other hand, it's awfully nice to have an ambassador's wife who does not ride you or expect you to do various things. The only thing I ever laid down—and I meant it—was to be on time. I tried

to scatter it around by inviting them to the parties. The political section people inevitably got the most attention.

Q: Yes. Did they act as assistant hostesses to you?

TIBBETTS: Yes, in a sense. I would say, “Get in and mingle. I don't want you over in the corner talking to one of the American men. Get out there and work.” But there was no problem about it.

Q: Did many of them work as teachers?

TIBBETTS: No, none of them worked. I don't think it was allowed at that point in a post like Oslo. But they all were very active in a lot of the school and family activities.

Q: Sure, sure. Could you tell me what sort of things you did for July Fourth?

TIBBETTS: Well, that's always a nuisance. I always had to make a speech. There was a monument in the park, I guess it was to Washington and Lincoln, the Norwegian-American Society had. Anyway, I had to make a speech there of about five minutes, and there was always a gathering present. I always had to write my own speeches because the USIS people did such a lousy job, so I wrote my own. Then I always had a reception, but it was an invitation reception, and I had as many of the American—people from the Norwegian-American Club, Norwegian-American Society. Norwegian-American Women were American women who'd married Norwegians. You mix it in with enough of the Norwegian foreign office. But it wasn't an all-out great bang affair. It was usually about 150 people, or something like that.

Q: Did you have the diplomatic corps?

TIBBETTS: Not if I could help it. I had them at so many other things. The diplomatic corps doesn't get neglected. And they're a real waste of time, you know. Of what conceivable use is it to the American ambassador to entertain a Latin?

Q: Quite. You mention the Norwegian-American Club. Did the American embassy wives have a club that they invited these women to?

TIBBETTS: No. They went quite often to the Norwegian-American Women. Some of them who were interested did, and some of them who weren't interested didn't.

Q: But there wasn't an embassy wives' club?

TIBBETTS: No, there wasn't an embassy wives' club. Not that I know of, no.

Q: Did you include your local employees at any of your functions?

TIBBETTS: Yes, I did. It was always easier to include some than others. But we had—oh, in the economic section, there were two or three very good ones who were agricultural researchers and economic researchers. And I had some of the ranking ones in the consular section; certain functions they always came to.

Q: Did you have your American communicators to any of your—

TIBBETTS: Code people?

Q: Code people.

TIBBETTS: No, I don't think I did. I don't remember ever having them. But your local employees, you know, somebody who may be just a local to you, may be quite a big wheel in the community. He's a graduate of the university and it's a well-known family, etc., etc. This is something people should be aware of. I don't think our code room personnel ever

would have been even remotely interested. I always had a Christmas party for everybody in the embassy.

Q: Oh, you did?

TIBBETTS: Oh, yes. Everybody showed up then, drunk or sober, although we didn't have any serious problems.

Q: But they didn't come to the July Fourth thing?

TIBBETTS: Oh, yes, they came to the July Fourth thing.

Q: I see, everybody came to that. I see you spent a good part of your career overseas. Did you find you had to switch gears when you came back to the department?

TIBBETTS: I started in the department, so I knew what I was getting back into. But, yes, you do have to switch a little bit. But it wasn't such a shock to me as it was to some people. The problem of clearances and all this sort of thing almost killed some senior officers, you know, who came back after years overseas. And let's face it, overseas your pace of life is more at your own reckoning.

Q: Yes. Well, did you find it a strain to always be on display? Did you have any private life?

TIBBETTS: Yes, I had a private life. It's not a strain so much as it's a bore. It's a strain sometimes. What you have to watch if you're an ambassador is if you have personal friends. For example, I liked the air attach# and his wife very much, but I had to be careful not to see more of them than I did of the army attach# and his wife, because the military get terribly childish about this sort of thing. Incredibly so. But I did have a private life, and I had Norwegian friends. I had a very close friendship with the commander of the Norwegian Air Force and his wife. But I'm by nature a loner. I like to do things by myself, and I'm an intense reader. If I had an evening at home alone, all I wanted to do was sit, just sit.

Q: It's like a gift, isn't it, having an evening at home?

TIBBETTS: It's a gift. I'm a bird watcher and a skier. All these things I like to do by myself. Sometimes you did things with other people, too, but I always—I have to get out and restore my tissues.

Q: Sure, sure.

TIBBETTS: And that was what I did. So I didn't have any problem that way. Sometimes with maids—I had an Italian couple taking care of me, and they were very gregarious, like most Italians, and they said, “Don't you get lonely?” Well, the answer is, “No.” This is to say it was necessary that way.

Q: Did you bring this Italian couple with you?

TIBBETTS: No. I inherited them from Frances Willis. She had been there as an ambassador, you see, and they liked her very much as a single woman. The great advantage to servants of the single woman, of course, is that she gets up in the morning and she leaves the house, and so there was no housewife underfoot all the time, which they liked very much. That worked very well with both of us.

Q: Now, that leads me to this question. Florence Harriman, Frances Willis, and Margaret Tibbetts all served in Norway.

TIBBETTS: Yes.

Q: In Luxembourg, there was Perle Mesta, Pat Harris, Ruth Farkas, and Rosemary Ginn. Ridgway was in Finland; Anderson and White were in Denmark.

TIBBETTS: Yes.

Q: Is this good or bad?

TIBBETTS: You have to watch for something. Now, in Norway, Mrs. Harriman, of course, had been a novelty. She was back in the dark ages.

Q: Yes.

TIBBETTS: Frances Willis had been extremely good, and this was a great asset to me, because when I arrived, Trygve Lie said to me, “You know, it came up in the cabinet, another woman.” And Lie said, “Look, the last one was better than most of the men.” And that was absolutely true. But they all liked the fact I was a professional very much. That sugared the pill very much indeed.

Q: As was Willis, of course.

TIBBETTS: As had been with Miss Willis, as you say. Then after you get working into it, I don't think anybody paid any attention. The foreign office was so relieved to discover that they could depend on what I told them, and that sort of thing. But, as I say, frankly, Frances Willis had been a great assist. When I was in the department, back in the department, after I came home from Norway, one day somebody came in from Mrs. Louchheim's office, and she said, “Oh, they've just had the world's brightest idea. Wouldn't it be nice if we could get certain posts reserved for women.” [Katie Louchheim, deputy assistant secretary for Educational and Cultural Affairs.]

I said, “That's the worst idea in the world.” And she said, “Why?”

I said, “Well, first of all, it would do irreversible damage to our relations with any country if they discovered that we were making them a convenience for placing women; and, secondly, as one of the people who'd be considered, frankly, why should women be consigned to a particularly post? Anything to do with quotas or that sort of thing is just hopeless, and the men would laugh themselves sick. They'd be delighted if you could lock women out of certain or difficult posts.”

So this is what you have to watch. I think that some posts have gotten sort of reconciled—these places like Scandinavia, Luxembourg and so forth. But they have discovered that if they get a professional, it doesn't—before I went to Norway, when I was sort of in limbo—[President] Johnson had just said I was going to be an ambassador—one of the Dutch informally asked at the Department if there was a chance they would get me because, he said they'd had a number of nonprofessional ambassadors. They knew I was a professional. Okay. This man would rather have been sure of getting a professional in the job. The fact that you're a woman doesn't matter if you're a professional. This flattered me greatly.

This doesn't mean that [a] non-professional cannot be good; Katherine White was excellent; she was really very good, and she was very popular with the Danes, which is what counts. She kept it strictly a business, and she knew exactly what she was doing.

Q: Sure. In the course of your career, did you yourself recruit or help or promote other women?

TIBBETTS: No, not necessarily. I had to go on recruiting drives, but I don't know if they amounted to anything. That's one of those things you had to do as a junior officer. No, I didn't actually. Roz Ridgway told me, after she'd been in Oslo, “You know, you turned me down at one point earlier.”

And then, I remembered dimly, personnel had said—and I said, “No, you can't have too many women; you've got to look at the balance of your post and relations.”

Then when Roz came up as a good officer, George Vest told me she was excellent, and I grabbed her. But I think that at the first stage I believed that I mustn't let personnel get the idea that all women are going to go to one post. You know, people in personnel can be very single-minded. [George Vest, deputy director of Office of Political-Military Affairs.]

Q: I know.

TIBBETTS: They can think that just because X is a woman, you automatically want all the women there. You have to watch it. You have to apply the same rules. But I certainly never favored women. Again, you know, that would be fatal. You've got to be fair with everybody. And if you're working with the men, they must feel that you're absolutely fair.

Q: Yes. You help probably more just by your example than anything else.

TIBBETTS: I had an excellent woman in the consular section, Virginia Weyres, who was absolutely first class. She was the assistant chief in the consular section.

Q: Yes. It depends on the individual, doesn't it?

TIBBETTS: Absolutely.

Q: Can you recall any particular problems that are unique to women living alone overseas?

TIBBETTS: No, I don't think so. You never have any problem finding servants. As I say, they like to work for single women. I never was in a post where I had any fears about law and order and safety. And I think most places, you're better off than you are in some cities of the United States. You know, your social life, your personal life—this is something you do. I've always kept my personal life strictly out of the office, although I have good friends with people within the office. But you have to—your personal relationships—it doesn't work in the office. No, I can't think of anything. But remember, I've lived in a limited range of posts. And certainly there was no problem of law and order in the Congo, or any servant problem or anything like that.

Q: There wasn't? Yes, it's kind of silly to ask you if you had trouble in Europe.

Now, this is a question that a male FSO has asked me to put to people, because this is his theory. He thinks there are two ways you have to function in the Foreign Service—one way

in the States, and one way overseas. And he thinks that overseas, the way to get ahead is don't press—sweep things under the rug, manage but not solve problems, because everything is solved back in Washington.

TIBBETTS: Well, it's like a lot of theories; it's to a certain extent true. However, they are not going to be able to solve the problem back in Washington unless they get the sort of realistic advice from overseas which is necessary, and that can never come from sweeping it under the rug.

Now, if he means that if you have a particular—it's possible that the government to which you are accredited overseas, if there's something they very much want, like an airport or something like that, they're going to push night and day, and it's not realistic to get it—don't press the department. You do better by just saying frankly to the government to which you're accredited, “Forget about it,” and keep quiet.

No, I think that it is frustrating overseas if you think that all the decisions are made in Washington. You have to bear that in mind, and you have to be realistic. But if you do your part in handling yourself responsibly and speaking intelligently and responsibly to the department, you are going to be listened to whether or not you want it.

If it is a large country like England, where the embassy in London is so huge and there are so many things going on that the ambassador is really just serving as a messenger boy on some issues, the ambassador's views can be felt if they're intelligent and if he or she works at it. You can't change policy if the country to which you're accredited has no role in it; that is, I could not expect the Department of State to change policy in Vietnam because the Norwegians didn't like it or the Europeans didn't like it. What you do is to report views, and it becomes one thing. But if it is something in which the country in which you're concerned does have a role to play, then you can make your weight felt.

Q: Well, do you agree with him that back in the department, the way to get things done is to be very active, aggressive?

TIBBETTS: Yes, he's right. He's absolutely right. By being aggressive—I mean pursuing a point tenaciously. I would prefer the word tenacious. I always said that on certain points I was a good fighter. And you have to be a good fighter. This doesn't mean persistent fighting after you've lost your case, but you must be very tenacious and you must push on it. If you're going to sit around, other people are going to run with it. I spent a great many years dealing with the Pentagon, and, believe me, you have to be alert and active there. But basically, yes, you have to be active.

Q: Would you agree, then, that there really are two different ways of operating in the Foreign Service?

TIBBETTS: Oh, yes, there are two different ways of operating. I would agree with him on that point. But I wouldn't say that the thing to do overseas is sweep it under the rug.

Q: He took it a step further and said, "Overseas, the way to act is in a more feminine way." And I said, "You mean men, too?" He said, "Yes, men, too."

TIBBETTS: Well, yes, he's right in a sense. If you're in a country, you must remember, as you well know, that it is their country and not try to be too aggressive. And also, I used to tell the boys at the embassy, "Remember, we're seeking information," and I would say, "When you want something from the foreign office, don't make a long visit. Don't come in and sit down and go right through, clear up all your points, because this man is busy and working. If you make it a short visit, you can get in anytime you want to. Remember, he's doing you a favor by sitting there, if you're seeking information."

If it's a point of negotiation, it's different. But, yes, always be pleasant and be easy. You know, a great deal of diplomatic reporting—the political reporting—it's the indirect question. You don't say, "Why are you people acting so stubbornly on this question?" You

say, “Well, isn't it possible that some of your people are being a little bit obdurate on such and such?” You know, this is the way you go into it, subtle and indirect. If that's feminine, why that's what it is, but certainly it's not just a question of being more polite. It's a question of, say, remembering it's their country.

Q: But you had no trouble in changing from one role to the other?

TIBBETTS: No, no. I've been in the business forever.

Q: That's the difference.

TIBBETTS: Remember, when I joined the State Department, I was twenty-five. You take someone who's twenty-five and train them right, and that makes a great difference.

Q: Yes, it certainly does. Do you think that frequent service abroad, which you certainly had, advances or impedes the role of reaching chief of mission?

TIBBETTS: I think it advances it.

Q: You think it does advance it?

TIBBETTS: Yes, I do. It does advance it. It's the type of job you get in the Department, though. If you're assigned back to the Department of State in a job in the secretariat, that's advancing; or if you're a desk officer in the political section. But if you're assigned back to the Department of State as an assistant information officer in the research department or something, that's not going to advance you so much. The same way overseas. If you get to be consular, second consular officer in Palermo, it's not as good as going as second secretary to the political section in London.

Q: Do you think this is going to be true in the future, where so many different agencies have their people they're sending and where foreign policy all seems to be decided here?

TIBBETTS: Well, I think if you go overseas and serve, if you're any good at all, you come back, you speak with a certain amount of authority on it. It is, after all, a foreign affairs agency. But it depends upon learning the Washington circuit very thoroughly. That's been the problem—used to be the problem of some senior officers. They couldn't accept the fact that whereas they were a big man in old Guadalajara, they couldn't come back here and speak with the same authority. They had to work it out.

Q: So a post back in the States that had you dealing with other agencies, then, would be very helpful?

TIBBETTS: Oh, yes, very helpful. My experience in dealing with the Pentagon all these years was enormously important to me. If you could go through dealing with the Pentagon on some of these issues, you could go through anything, I'll tell you that.

Q: Did you feel you pretty much guided your own career? Or did you think it was more State's deciding to use you in a certain way?

TIBBETTS: State decided—I landed on my feet. I came into the department of European affairs. I had no more idea that European affairs [EUR] was any more important than anything else. It was just where I happened to land. I landed with people who trained me very thoroughly, because they were that sort of persons. It was easier to have someone around the office who's trained right than someone who isn't. I got along well with them and was quick to learn. I could see, as I got older, why I had done so well, in a way, because you never had to tell me anything more than a certain amount of times. And it was then, after a while, that they decided to use me. I was there to be used. I was a good instrument, so to speak.

The fact that I was a woman was very helpful. And again, Frances Willis had been right there in EUR, and it had been very useful to EUR to be able to produce a woman political

officer. They had met every obligation laid upon them in advance, with relatively little pain to themselves.

Q: When you came back, after having been ambassador, did you have any problems adjusting to more ordinary life?

TIBBETTS: No, I don't think so. More ordinary life was no problem at all, because, you know, it would have been nice to have the servants, but in Washington I always had a very fine woman who used to work for me, and I just picked up more or less with her. I dearly wish she were here now. That's one thing about Bethel.

Q: Yes.

TIBBETTS: No, I didn't have any. And the question of not having to go to cocktail parties and things—I kept count in Oslo. In one year, I think I had to go to 150 cocktail parties, and that sort of thing irritates me. You get worn out.

Q: You didn't feel at all deflated not having the car and so on?

TIBBETTS: No. I didn't have any problem. I always had a big social rush from certain embassies anyway. Remember, I was deputy assistant secretary of state for European affairs, and so you were filling in. I didn't feel deflated. I didn't miss the attention. Some people do miss attention. Some people do miss the social life. I didn't miss that at all. That didn't bother me at all, because I was very happy to resume work. And I didn't feel deflated.

Q: Would you have liked another embassy, if circumstances had permitted?

TIBBETTS: If it had been a good enough embassy, yes. It had to be an interesting job, not just to have a job as a job; because I couldn't have taken an eating job, one of these

things where you just eat around. No, I would have had to have good, substantive work and enjoyed it. Yes, that would have been pleasant.

Q: Because you enjoy the work.

TIBBETTS: Yes, I enjoy the work; that's right. There are enough dull aspects of being an ambassador; you've got to have some interesting ones. Now, mind you, any job has its dull aspects. But, as I say, I couldn't take just an eating job. As ambassador, you know, you run a catering service in a sense, and that's not always the most fun.

Q: Carol Laise told me that she felt the best job in an embassy was the chief political officer.

TIBBETTS: Yes, that's the most fun in a way. It has all the advantages of being at the top and knowing what's going on, and none of the disadvantages of having to take on all the stuff. That's true; it's very true, that's right.

Q: You used practically her very words. Well, looking back, can you think of anything you wish you had done differently?

TIBBETTS: Of course, there are certain things where you might have done individual things differently. No, I was very, very fortunate in the way my career developed. As I hope I've made it plain, a certain amount of it was started and I didn't have that much to do with it. I was constantly in the right place at the right time—or frequently in the right place at the right time. No, I don't think I would have had a different career if I could have.

Q: How about as an ambassador? Would you have changed anything in the way you—

TIBBETTS: I think I did quite a good job. As I've said, I think that was one of the areas where I did best. I don't think I did badly at any of the jobs I had, but I think that was one

of the jobs which I really did well. No, I wouldn't. As I say, eliminate some of the dull spots, but that's a moot point.

Q: That's very reassuring.

TIBBETTS: And you can't change my nature. You know, I couldn't be in a wild social business, because that isn't what I like, that type of thing.

Q: No, no. How do you see the future of women in the Service?

TIBBETTS: Well, I think the way it is now, the doors are all open and it's there; they've just got to be good enough to do it. I mean, it's like everything else. It should be one of those areas that's open.

The real problem with women, you know, has nothing to do with upper middle-class, educated professionals, like women in the Foreign Service or in academics or law or anything like that. The real problem with women is the woman who has six kids and is married to someone who works for low wages. But for educated women it's all up to them if they want. This is the advice I gave Roz Ridgway, who didn't need it. “Just be as competent as you can. Just go ahead and be yourself,” and I said with Roz, “You're so bright, you won't have any problems.” That's what I would say to anyone, is be as competent as you can.

Q: Yes. She's very highly regarded, as you know.

TIBBETTS: Always. She's really very good, very fine.

Q: Yes. How do you feel about a professional screening body for ambassadors?

TIBBETTS: You know, it's not necessarily a bad idea, but the point is whether or not the president wants it. Unless the president wants it and is prepared to listen to it, I'm not sure it would be any good. It's like everything else. You know, there are a lot of very fine career

officers, and some career officers don't know anything at all. We always used to say with inspectors, the first thing to do when an inspector comes in is put some minor problem up to him that he can solve, and then he feels so good he's going to stay out of your way and leave you alone. Just be sure you find something for him to solve, because some of them really didn't know what the hell they were doing. Some of them do, and some of them don't. Well, it's like everything else. As I say, some Foreign Service officers may be excellent in their way, but they don't translate it. I say it depends entirely on the president.

Q: You don't feel that a body should be set up, as it is with federal judges?

TIBBETTS: I don't think it would hurt if the president paid attention to what it says. That's going to be the key thing. Now, President Johnson leaned very heavily on career ambassadors in his European tour of European posts. I went to the chiefs of mission meeting in Bonn, and it was dazzling the amount of talent around the room, except for the poor fellow from Ireland, whoever he might have been. I've never seen such a display of talent, but that was almost the last time, because most of the European posts have since been politicized. Nixon moved very heavily in the political way.

I think it wouldn't hurt if the president paid attention, but everything depends on the president. And we must never forget, of course, that some excellent officers have come out of the non-career. Lewis Douglas was easily the most successful ambassador with whom I served in London.

Q: What is your attitude towards the women's movement now?

TIBBETTS: They waste a lot of time on the things that don't matter. What matters very much to women—and should never be forgotten—is the type of jobs you get and money. You must get the same amount of money, you must get your chance at the good jobs, and all these other things don't matter. I don't pay any attention to whether they do or do not organize politically. They don't seem to have much effect. And anything such as—well, the

stuff they used to go through, like whether or not it should be “chairperson” or something like that, is ludicrous and a terrible waste of time.

Once, one of the reporters, I guess from the Chicago Tribune or some women's page, said to me, “Can women make their influence felt in foreign affairs?” And I said, “Oh, yes.”

She said, “How?” I said, “Well, they can vote. They can petition. They can agitate. They can write their congressmen.” She said, “That's exactly the same way the men have.”

Well, that's exactly all you need to make your influence felt. And I think the women's movement can, if they can get organized and not waste their time on agitating about various things, they can be very important. But I don't think you have to be a member of the women's movement to do it.

Q: So it wouldn't upset you to be called “Madam Ambassador” rather than just plan “Ambassador”?

TIBBETTS: I was called “Madam Ambassador.”

Q: And it didn't bother you?

TIBBETTS: No. That's what I liked, to be called “Madam Ambassador.” It's what the people in the embassy called me. The foreign office called me “Ambassador,” and the other diplomats called me “Ambassador,” except some who always called me “Excellency.” I was always called “Madam Ambassador,” and like it. But I don't object to being called “Miss Tibbetts.” This is immaterial. I'm a woman, so why would I object to being called “Madam Ambassador”? I wouldn't have permitted a member of my staff to call me “Ambassador,” no, sir. I called Douglas MacArthur, “Mr. Ambassador.” Well, they could call me “Madam Ambassador.”

Q: That's interesting, because I have already had some flak from some of the others who don't want to be called “Madam Ambassador.”

TIBBETTS: Well, that's what I mean. I think it's a waste of time. I would never have dreamed of addressing Ambassador Douglas—I wouldn't have said “Ambassador.” I would have said “Mr. Ambassador.” Well, then, why couldn't they call me “Madam”?

Q: Yes, that's what I thought, too. This is a very impertinent question, but could you tell me what you consider the most important achievements in your life?

TIBBETTS: I don't think anything I haven't already covered; I think I did well in aspects of the career.

Q: And what is important to you now in your retirement?

TIBBETTS: Well, I do a lot of things locally which are important to me because I was born here. So that's what you care about. I'm on a committee, the State Committee for Judicial Responsibility, which is, in effect, the committee which judges judges, which is sort of fun.

Q: Oh, really?

TIBBETTS: Judicial conduct is the question. It's surprisingly interesting, too. And I taught at Bowdoin, which I enjoyed very much. But I don't do that anymore. Teaching's very hard work. I like to garden. I like to do things locally; that's about it.

Q: Are you involved in the church?

TIBBETTS: I contribute, but I'm not very big in the church. I'm very big in the library, I'm very big in the Historical Society, the budget committee on the town, that sort of thing. I've gotten out of a lot of things.

Q: Are you a Congregationalist?

TIBBETTS: Yes.

Q: You are. The lady in our hotel said she thought you went to her church, but she wasn't quite sure.

TIBBETTS: Well, I did, but just sort of. I'm not, as I say, really involved in it. I shun the offices.

Q: Yes, well, you've had more than your share of that. May I ask just a few questions about your early life?

TIBBETTS: What's that?

Q: Most of it was covered in the other oral history, but I didn't see any reference to grandparents. Were they a factor in your life?

TIBBETTS: I knew them and liked them, but they didn't live near here. They just visited, probably two or three times a year. They were very kind.

Q: I see. You lost your brother when he was in the war?

TIBBETTS: Yes.

Q: The early part of the war. Did that have any effect on you? Well, of course, it had an effect, but I mean, did it change your thinking in any way?

TIBBETTS: No. It made me probably a little bit more eager to go into the government during the war when I was through. It simply, as I say, probably stimulated that more than going right into teaching, which I could have done from Bryn Mawr. But a slight feeling of duty, perhaps.

Q: That's what I wondered, yes. Had he been to university?

TIBBETTS: He went to Bowdoin, yes.

Q: I see you and your sister both have Ph.D.s.

TIBBETTS: That's right.

Q: So I then assume that your parents treated you all the same?

TIBBETTS: Oh, yes.

Q: That it was just assumed—

TIBBETTS: All the same; very much the same. No question about it. We were very much treated the same.

Q: There never was any question.

TIBBETTS: No, never any question.

Q: Was your father authoritarian?

TIBBETTS: No. He was very much the strong-minded man, but he and my mother were pretty much an equal, even team. They were both strong-minded. And my mother was a very outgoing, dominant personality. My father was strong-minded, but he was more silent. Mother had the advantage of him there. But they were both very strong personalities.

Q: Did one have more of an influence over you than the other? Or did it vary with stages in your life?

TIBBETTS: Varied with subject, rather than with stages. The doctor was always the basic determinant on certain things in the sense that—oh, obviously, money. He set the limits; the parameters there were set. But my mother and father, if they didn't agree, they settled it between themselves before they spoke with us. And the family values were very much, I

suppose, middle-class, upward mobility, and that sort of thing. They were both very much that way.

Q: Yes, they must have been. When you were little, you played with two neighboring boys. Were you a tomboy?

TIBBETTS: Yes, I was a tomboy. There weren't any little girls in the neighborhood, particularly, to play with, except one very good friend, who was also a tomboy. We all played together.

Q: What was the impact of the war on you, aside from your brother?

TIBBETTS: Oh, it was very major. You see, all the years I was at college (I graduated in 1941), you talked constantly about things like Munich. And then you came out. Of course, what we didn't realize at the time was that the war had transformed the economic life of the world, so we stepped out, and immediately (and all my life) I was sought after for jobs. It was a different thing completely, and the whole world changed. But, of course, for my generation, it was the consuming thing.

Q: Did you have any special activities during the war? Red Cross work, anything like that?

TIBBETTS: No. I was in college, and then I went into OSS [Office of Strategic Services].

Q: Yes, full time. You had to have French for the Belgian things. Had you learned that at University?

TIBBETTS: No. I had to work at it. I had had some in high school, and then I took German in college. I had to pick up with a French tutor in London, enough to pass the examinations. I'd always passed the written examinations. Then when I went to the Congo, I had a tutor, and I worked very hard with him. This is something I got to be very good at —getting to a place and picking out a tutor; not just someone who knew the language, but someone who knew something else, so that you have something to talk about. It's no good

learning the language if you can't talk about it. I was very lucky; I got a journalist of one of the newspapers in the Congo, such as they were. He was a Belgian, of course. I worked on it. When I went to Brussels, I didn't need a tutor.

Q: I was amused, when I was reading your transcript, at what you said about the way they teach it at the Foreign Service Institute—the silly questions they ask.

TIBBETTS: No, no, it's stupid.

Q: I think you made a good point, too, when you said, "It depends on how old you are when you start this total immersion stuff."

Did you feel you had sufficient training in the department before you went overseas?

TIBBETTS: Yes. I had much better training than many people, because I was not only trained well in the techniques, but I had quite a lot of freedom of action at the Canadian desk. In those days, we had about fourteen consulates in Canada, and there was always somebody to be briefed or to be debriefed, and they were glad to let me do that after a while. I saw a lot of officers and I saw a lot of the way in which they did things and the way in which they worked, and in a way I learned as much from what a lot of them didn't do as from what they did do. So I had excellent training.

Q: In general, which assignments are best for a career that is, hopefully, aiming for the top?

TIBBETTS: Political assignments.

Q: Political assignments?

TIBBETTS: Whatever they tell you, don't ever be fooled. Economic assignments aren't bad. And I don't care what they're going to write about channels and cones, but that's all

nonsense. If you want to get to the top, you have a political assignment, or an economic assignment if you're good enough. That will work, too.

Q: But those would be the two cones you would—

TIBBETTS: Yes, the two cones. Joan Clark is an outstanding example, and I knew Joan very well in London; she is a gifted, gifted administrator. But a good number of administrators are intellectually less gifted—or just hacks roaming around. Joan is really very good at it and she cares about it, and that's why she—it's not because she's in the administrative cone; it's because Joan would have been an ambassador in whatever cone she was in. She wasn't given the sort of academic training that would have put her in the political cone, but she's probably the outstanding example of an administrative person who got it, but that's because she's so good. [Joan Clark, ambassador to Malta, March 1979 - February 1981]

Q: So basically what you're saying is, it really boils down to the individual?

TIBBETTS: It boils down to the individual. But the sort of individual that's going to make it is more likely to be in the economic or the political section, certainly in my experience. And no matter how they try to change it, that's going to happen.

Q: Yes. Can you think of any things about Katherine White [U.S. Ambassador to Denmark, 1964-68]? I can't find her.

TIBBETTS: She's somewhere in New Jersey, I think. I don't know. She'd come from the Women's Democratic National Committee in New Jersey. I have no idea where or what her address is. It's been many, many years since I've been in touch.

Q: Would you know anyone who might know?

TIBBETTS: Her husband's name is Arthur. I don't know. Mrs. Louchheim's office might know. Don't tell Mrs. Louchheim I referred slightingly to the young woman from her office.

Mrs. Louchheim meant very well, but she was an amateur. Katherine White was a friend of hers, though; they'd been at Vassar. Katherine White graduated from Vassar. Her father used to be an ambassador to Turkey many years ago. Katherine White's about ten years older than I am. She has to be 75 or 76.

Q: Yes. There is a move to set up a repository of papers of prominent department people, starting with the women ambassadors, at the new Foreign Service Institute. They're building a new campus in Arlington. I wonder if you would be interested, willing—

TIBBETTS: I don't have any—I don't know what they mean by papers.

Q: They mean letters, diaries, journals.

TIBBETTS: No. I promised those to the Bethel Historical Society many years ago, because all my letters home contain more about Bethel than they do about anything else; my mother's letters and hers to me. So anyway, I'm promised.

Q: You're all promised.

TIBBETTS: I'm promised. Radcliffe went through the same business.

Q: Did they?

TIBBETTS: Yes. I said they could index them to the Bethel Historical Society.

Q: Yes. Well, one last question. I need to use some of the things that are in your Schlesinger oral history.

TIBBETTS: That's all right. I think I put that prohibition on simply because I didn't want to be quoted out of context. My impatience with the Schlesinger thing—actually, I was very flattered, but sometimes they got too much into the women's page type of business, and my overwhelming emphasis is, of course, that people should be competent. I'm not

particularly feminist quo feminist, but I would have been very upset if I hadn't had an equal opportunity, you understand.

But you could quote anything—you can use anything. Use certain discretion if I've made any personal comments about people. You know, do it the way we always do, “An informed source says . . .,” without quoting it by name. Yes, I think, as I say, you could do that, as it goes into a serious context.

Q: And what we've said today, the same?

TIBBETTS: What we've said today, exactly.

Q: You would want to see it before—you would want to see any references?

TIBBETTS: Yes. I'd want to see any references, just in case I want to correct something. You never know how it's going to come out.

Q: Well, that's true; that's true.

TIBBETTS: I think that you certainly have a much deeper background and your questions are very good.

Q: Oh, thank you.

TIBBETTS: Oh, they're very good indeed. They're very much to the point, because looking at forty-four women ambassadors, there are great differences, you know.

Q: There are great differences, very great differences.

TIBBETTS: Very great differences, indeed.

Q: Thank you very much for answering all my questions. You've been very helpful indeed.

End of interview